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China Frees 2 Americans

HONG KONG (AP)—China today freed two Americans, a man held captive for 19 years and a woman captured on a yacht in 1968. The pair crossed into Hong Kong and left on a flight for the United States.

The Peking government announced it had reduced the life sentence of another American and that a fourth American prisoner committed suicide more than two years ago.

Richard Fecteau, 43, a civilian Army employee from Lynn, Mass., captured during the Korean War, and Mary Ann Harbert crossed the border in the early afternoon. A Royal Air Force helicopter flew them to Kai Tak airport, and there they boarded a U.S. military plane for the United States, a spokesman for the Hong Kong government said.

It was not revealed where the plane was taking them.

Peking announced that the life sentence being served by John T. Downey, 41, of New Britain, Conn., had been commuted to five years, starting from the date of commutation. That date was not announced, but presumably it was recent.

Fecteau and Downey were listed as civilian employees of the U.S. Army, but the Chinese contended they were CIA agents, air-dropping Nationalist Chinese spies, a charge the U.S. government repeatedly denied.

The fourth American listed by Peking today was Gerald Ross McLaughlin. The New China News Agency said he was captured with Miss Harbert aboard a yacht in Chinese territorial waters north of Hong Kong on April 21, 1968. The Communist agency said he committed suicide March 7, 1969, while under investigation.

Peking's announcement was the first positive word of the capture of Miss Harbert and McLaughlin, and no information about them was available in Hong Kong.

In the Azores, President Nixon today hailed the release of the two prisoners and the shortening of the sentence of the third.

White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said Nixon's national security affairs adviser Henry A. Kissinger negotiated with Chinese Premier Chou En-lai during his two trips to China on the subject of American prisoners.

"The President welcomes this act of clemency of the People's Republic of China," Ziegler told newsmen who accompanied Nixon to the

Azores for a meeting with French President Georges Pompidou.

Ziegler said the U.S. government had been informed in advance of the Chinese plans to release the two Americans.

Two other Americans are known to be still imprisoned in China: Air Force Capt. Phillip E. Smith, whose plane was shot down over the Gulf of Tonkin in September 1965, and Lt. Robert J. Flynn, a U.S. Navy pilot presumed shot down over China's Kwangsi Province in August 1967.

Navy Lt. Joseph Dunn, whose plane was shot down off China's Hainan Island in February 1968, is listed as missing on the Chinese mainland.

The government spokesman said Fecteau looked healthy and wore a blue Chinese suit with blue cap. Miss Harbert, in Western-style clothes, appeared healthy but rather thin, the spokesman said. They had eight pieces of luggage with them.

Their Plane Downed

Fecteau and Downey were captured in 1952 during the Korean War when a military plane on which they were passengers was shot down on a flight from Japan to Korea.

Fecteau served 19 years of a 20-year sentence. He and Downey were visited last month by Downey's mother, Mrs. Mary Downey, 74, who told newsmen afterward that her son looked "well and in good spirits." Mrs. Downey predicted commutation of her son's sentence and said Fecteau was due for release soon.

Downey's sister, Mrs. Mary Walsh, contacted today at her home in New Britain, said through tears: "I'm very happy for Richard Fecteau—I think it's wonderful. That's all I can say now."

The Chinese Communists held two other Americans in prison for years. In July 1970, they released Roman Catholic Bishop James Walsh, 79, after holding him for 12 years on espionage charges. The other American was Hugh Redmond, 51. Peking said he committed suicide in April 1970. Arrested in 1951, he also was accused of espionage and was serving a life sentence.